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LETTER DATED 20 NOVEMBER 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF DJIBOUTI TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

The statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea on 19 November 1998 (S/1998/1097), in reaction to Djibouti's decision to sever diplomatic ties, is nothing more than a litany of lies and deception.

(a) It is totally erroneous and a sheer lie for Eritrea to say that it has repeatedly expressed its concern to us. We have not had a single communication from Eritrea concerning the so-called "unwarranted cooperation" of Djibouti with Ethiopia in its war efforts against Eritrea.

Perhaps the only occasion upon which there was an attempt by Eritrea to communicate anything to us was last September during the visit of Eritrea's Minister for Foreign Affairs to Djibouti. The issue presented to us then centred only on Djibouti's neutrality in the efforts of the High-level Committee of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The Government right away rejected unhelpful innuendos and unfounded allegations. Now the allegations we hear go beyond that and are all-embracing. According to a spokesman in Eritrea, Djibouti has become a party to the conflict by supporting the Ethiopian war effort through providing facilities and services to the Ethiopian army. Sheer nonsense!

(b) Our President, true to his belief in tolerance and statesmanship, deemed it inappropriate to personally react to the direct confrontation by the President of Eritrea during the meeting of the OAU High-level Committee in Ouagadougou. His silence was not an admission of anything whatsoever. He simply felt it would be proper for his peers to reply to the unfortunate and ill-timed charges. Civility costs nothing and buys everything!

(c) But, one may ask, "what constitutes unwarranted cooperation"? It must be clearly understood, at the outset, that the port of Djibouti was constructed at the turn of this century essentially for the purpose of providing Ethiopia with access to the sea. Such was the case well before the Eritrean ports became available and usable for modern Ethiopia's needs.

Regardless of the percentage of usage by Ethiopia, the port of Djibouti has always retained a significant portion of Ethiopia's external trade. It was so

historically and it remains Ethiopia's natural port. It is unthinkable, therefore, for Eritrea to question this historical link today because of its conflict with Ethiopia. Let us be clear here: we are not aware of any United Nations sanctions imposed on the parties to the conflict, and further, Eritrea enjoys a full and unfettered use of its ports for whatever reason. This is a fact that must be underscored and we are not in any way trying to justify anything here.

From its inception as a separate and independent State, Eritrea's attitude towards external relations with its neighbours has been notable chiefly for its arrogance and scepticism. Throughout the Horn of Africa the consequences have been antipathy and estrangement, if not confrontation, reinforced by Eritrea's transparent disdain and condescension. There has been little sense of seriousness and appreciation on the part of Eritrea for the benefits to be derived from normal, constructive and mutually productive relations.

Djibouti is not under any illusion as to the underlying motive for Eritrea's hostile posture. In view of its strained relations with Eritrea, Ethiopia has substantially augmented her use of our facilities. That is natural. But Eritrea is unreasonably bitter about it. Consequently, Eritrea has elected to brand Djibouti a scapegoat in her troubles with Ethiopia. While it is true that our relations with Ethiopia are excellent, this is also true of our relations with all countries, and Djibouti should not be unfairly caricatured and made the object of threats and blackmail. We don't deserve that.

Provocations by Eritrea are many, but just to name a few:

- Our forces were fired upon after incursions into our territory by Eritrean troops in April 1996.

- This activity was preceded by the publication of a new Eritrean map incorporating portions of our territory.

Djibouti felt compelled to alert the international community of this unbecoming behaviour and the matter was brought to the attention of the Security Council.

- In the last few weeks we witnessed a number of visible signs that Eritrea is continuously amassing troops and excessive war <u>matériel</u> along our common border, and we have even heard of an incursion currently under way, the details of which are still sketchy.

- About two weeks ago, a fleet of trucks ferrying goods between Ethiopia and Eritrea was blatantly attacked, resulting in loss of lives and property.

- Djibouti does not discount the possibility that patronage is being extended to disgruntled individuals to cause havoc in parts of the country and to cripple the flow of traffic between Djibouti and Ethiopia.

We have tolerated Eritrea's excesses for too long. The intolerable affront to our President at Ouagadougou was the last straw. We regard the situation with extreme gravity. Bluntly, what we are witnessing is simply the prelude to war by Eritrea against yet another neighbour, this time Djibouti! Eritrea seems determined to widen the circle of the conflict. To accuse Djibouti of "becoming a party to the conflict" is an obvious deception, a smokescreen meant to hide from us Eritrea's true aim - to cripple and paralyse the normal flow of traffic in goods and services between Djibouti and Ethiopia.

We hope that the international community will not view the impending danger we face lightly, and will immediately institute the necessary preventive measures.

We believe the kind of ruthless diplomacy in progress would only exacerbate tension and hostilities and add many difficult years to the task of returning the Horn once again to a region of peace and trust. As my President stated in his address to the General Assembly in September: "We (in the Horn region) need a new vision, new politics and a far-sighted approach to deal with our bilateral differences". Our region has been bleeding for too long: it is crying for sanity, peace, democracy and development.

These are the real challenges, therefore, that require urgent attention from the leaders of the region and not short-term obsessions with brinkmanship.

Djibouti will continue to maintain moderation, neutrality, and cooperation, while at the same time protecting its territorial integrity and ensuring the security of its citizens.

I should be grateful if you would circulate this letter as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Roble OLHAYE
Permanent Representative